

# Making an abstract discovery

It's not often that you're privileged enough to have the feeling of making a discovery.

But right now you can get that sensation at a show being held, through June 12, at the Promega Gallery in Fitchburg off Fish Hatchery Road. (The address is

## VISUAL ART

Jacob Stockinger

2800 Woods Hollow Road, off Cheryl Drive. Gallery hours are weekdays 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., or by appointment. Call 274-4330.)

That's where you'll find the abstract art of Tom Sargeant, coupled in display with the unusual and eye-catching fiber art of his wife. (Another couple, from France, also are featured in the show, which is about the creative exchanges that take place when spouses or significant others both work in art and work together.)

Sargeant is a retired physician who lives in Madison and spent most of the 40 years of his professional life working as an internist with the Dean Clinic in Janesville.

"I played with painting all my life, but I never took it seriously," he recalls.

In 1995, Sargeant retired and since then has taken short courses and workshops.

He works in acrylics, known for their fast drying time and relatively odorless pigment. But his works — which sell for \$900 to



Tom Sargeant's Zen-like abstract art relies on balance without symmetry.

\$1,200 — catch the light beautifully and look very oil-like because he finishes them off with a coat of varnish. He also has a nice touch of signing the work on the side of the canvas, which eliminates the way signatures can interfere with the composition of the work itself.

There is something very Asian about his minimalist work, which exudes a Zen-like appeal, to use that much misapplied word.

Generally, these canvases are marked by subdued colors: off-whites, yellows and tans with occasional blacks. The surfaces are built up carefully, but with a variety of techniques. Sometimes Sargeant applies the paint thickly by using a palette knife. Other times he waters it down into a quasi-transparent diluted glaze. Underneath the lighter-

colored coats are darker-colored shapes, often a series of small black squares or rectangles. But unlike, say, Mondrian, Sargeant uses geometry sparingly in very subtle and unbusy ways.

"I like balance without symmetry," he says, and it is hard to think of a better description of his work. "It's pretty spontaneous. I don't have too much of an idea about what I'm going to do beforehand. I just let it come out."

To view what comes out is much like gazing into a carp pond or a Zen rock garden. It is calming and restorative, with a sense of rhythm and contained energy. Yet it also does not seem obviously therapeutic in some cliché sense. It seems, instead, wholly artistic.

Clearly, Sargeant has an eye for color, hue, shape and texture, which all come together nicely in his work and create a synergy.

So far, he says, he has only exhibited only in Wisconsin — in Racine and Kenosha, in Hudson and the Madison area, and in Door County. But for my money and to my eye, this is a man who clearly deserves gallery representation and a major show of his own.

Does Sargeant ever wish he'd pursued art instead of medicine?

"No," he says. "But I sometimes wish I had retired earlier."

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